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# THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS OF A WOMEN'S REFORMATORY

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The administrative problems of a woman's reformatory are manifold. They are of a great many types and may be interpreted from a great many angles, but after carefully sifting them they seem to fall into four relative classes, namely: those which involve the public, those which involve the board of directors, those which pertain to the staff, and those which pertain to the inmates. They are cited inversely in the order of their importance, for in the final analysis the work is done for the good of the inmates and their interest is the one that should be uppermost in the minds of all these four groups.

The first group of problems which we will consider are those pertaining to the public. These fall into two general classes. There is first the general public, which may be divided into the unintelligent or uninformed public who knows nothing about social problems in general or institutional work in particular, on the one hand, and on the other the intelligent or informed public, which is cognizant of social conditions and has a mild interest in social work. Next we have social agencies with public or private subsidies who are doing relief work or investigative work of one kind or another. In this connection may also be cited the police department of the state because it comes in contact with most of the wards that come to institutions. Another group that is included in the public are the judges who commit the women to the reformatory. Still another group are the legislators who appropriate the funds for the support of the institution.

The problems that confront us with regard to this whole group fall into two classes, the educational and the financial.

Usually the individuals in this group designated as the public understand nothing about the institutions of their state. A few realize that they are contributing to the support of them, so naturally their interpretation is in terms of finance. How much does it cost to support the institution? What is the money being used for that the citizens contribute through the taxes? These are the questions that the public is most concerned with. The problem of securing money

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in amounts sufficient for the needs of a growing institution and the development of its along progressive lines is a grave one, but is one that must be met if the work is to be done that the institution was established for. Large sums of money must be appropriated to establish the physical side of the organization and other sums of money must be secured to provide the staff which forms the other part of the organization. And the financial problem does not end there, but extends to the securing of funds for upkeep and reconstruction in accordance with new ideas and always the maintenance of the wards under our care.

In order to get this financial problem solved we must have education of the public. The various groups in this class must be given a working knowledge of the nature of the criminal, his needs and the equipment necessary for his rehabilitation. In other words, they must know more than the dollar and cents end of the work. This can be accomplished through the newspapers, by moving pictures and lectures and by practical demonstration of the work itself both in the institution and outside.

The public should be urged to visit the institutions of the state. Compulsory visitation of the institutions by judges, social workers and all others who deal with the wards of the state should be enacted by all state legislatures. No intelligent parent sends a child off to boarding school without visiting it or finding out if it is a suitable place to send the child in question. When the law steps in to replace parental control it places the same responsibility upon one or more of the persons whom this legislation would affect.

I once heard Newton D. Baker say that ignorance bred intolerance and that with education came knowledge, sympathy and tolerance. It is a well-known fact in business that if you get a man to buy a share of stock he immediately becomes interested in the undertaking and wants to know more about it. So with philanthropic enterprises. The moment a person contributes something he feels a partnership in it and seeks knowledge about it. Thus it would seem that one of the administrative problems of an institution is the education of the public in order to secure the financial backing that makes the other problem with regard to this group.

The next group with which we will deal is variously named the board, or committee or commission of managers, or trustees, or directors. In relative position they stand half way between the public and the institution. They are of the public and yet of the institution, so

that little will be said of the problems in connection with this group, as they are covered for the most part by one or other of the groups mentioned. Suffice it to say that the greatest problem in this connection is to secure the appointment of a group of persons to act as directors or trustees who have a genuine interest in human beings, who believe in reformatory work and who are willing to give the necessary time to the study of the work, so that they can give wise counsel, hearty support and intelligent co-operation to the superintendent whom they have placed at the helm. Further, this body must function in harmony and as a whole. It must have a knowledge of the principles of penology and must understand thoroughly the purpose and province of the institution, but must not interfere with the details of the running of the institution. It may determine upon a policy after a mutual understanding of the problems, but should not attempt to carry out the details of it.

Boards of directors should avoid the fatal attitude of inviting the criticism of the inmates and officers against the superintendent or her policy. The board should respect organization and should encourage the members of the staff to feel that loyalty and co-operation are paramount. They should see that provision is made for officers to get away for study in order that they may be progressive and enthusiastic in their work. It is in their province to secure financial backing for the institution and to further the educational program for the public.

The problems in the next group are those which have to do with the staff. These problems are perhaps the most serious, as upon the staff depends the morale of the institution. The superintendent of a reformatory must know the details of all the work under her supervision, but she must select others to take care of these details in order to conserve her time for critical work, new enterprises, etc. The most serious problem that any superintendent has to meet is to secure the right kind of officers. The qualifications must be of the highest, but usually the salary is not sufficient to be able to get or to keep persons of the calibre desired. The idea is fast vanishing that a social worker is a glorified missionary on half pay. Those engaged in social work have taken the yoke of service upon their shoulders. They are their "brother's keepers." But "the servant is worthy of his hire," and not until compensation is made commensurate with the qualifications demanded will the problem even approach solution. We all admit that a teacher is the most important influence in a child's life next to its parents if they are the right kind. If they are the wrong kind, the

importance of the teacher is paramount. The inmates of an institution are a special group and need special treatment, hence there is need of the best teachers obtainable. The qualifications of a good officer (and all officers are teachers) run something like this: she must be intelligent, refined and cultured; she must be patient, just, kind, sympathetic and good-natured; she must be dignified but have a capacity for fun; she must have teaching ability along her own lines; she must have common sense, loyalty, insight into human character, and, above all, she must love human beings and believe in the potentiality for good in each; she must be able to forget the wrongs done by the wards with whom she comes in contact. All this, and more, we expect of the average worker in an institution and in return pay her the munificent sum of \$40 or \$50 per month. So long as this condition exists will we have this problem.

Given a person with the right qualifications, there is still the problem of training her. This should be done in a uniform and well-regulated way. There should be established schools for the training of social workers other than case workers. Though many superintendents prefer to train their own workers rather than to take those who have been trained to similar work in other institutions, yet there are certain fundamentals that could be given in a course of instruction. They should be taught the theory and practice of criminology, of applied psychology and social service.

The problem of keeping good employees after they are secured is another trying one. The work they are engaged in is arduous and never-ending. Every effort should be made to make the hours conform as nearly as possible to the eight-hour day. They should be given frequent relief from duty; entertainments, picnics, and opportunities for self-expression, other than those employed every day in their contact with the girls, should be furnished. Staff meetings to discuss ways and means of public welfare will do much. There should be some one appointed to look after the schedule of the officers and to adjust matters of relief for them—some one to look after their comfort and happiness. A disgruntled employee is not an asset anywhere, and least of all in an institution where she is in contact with others twenty-four hours of the day. It confuses and retards the development of the wards to come in contact with disloyal officers, because one of the underlying reasons for their coming to the institution lies in the fact of their disloyalty and the following disorganization of all their forces:

This brings us to the last group of problems—those pertaining to the inmates.

Because there are so many types of inmates in a reformatory for adults and the problems of administration are common to all in varying degree, we will only enumerate the classes which have to be cared for, and they are as follows: girls between the ages of 16 and 21 who are in manifest danger of falling into habits of vice, inebriates, drug addicts, venereal cases, mothers and babies, expectant mothers, persons committing felonies or misdemeanors. There is no limitation as to age, color, marital status degree of delinquency or mentality, so our classification includes normal delinquents, mental defectives, epileptics, psychopaths and neurotics, moral deviates, sex perverts and all the conditions resulting from the grafting of one or more of these defects on one or more of the others.

The problem in connection with this group may be divided into intramural and extra-mural. Our intramural problems begin with the advent of the girl in the institution. The laws of Connecticut establishing the institution which we represent requires that the mittimus of each case be accompanied with as full a history of the case as can be secured. With rare exceptions no history comes with the commitment and we write to the judge or clerk of the court and the probation officer or police officer who handled the case, only to find that they have the meagerest history and it is appalling to find not a few cases in which the persons who have been instrumental in sending the girl to the institution admit that they know nothing about the case. So we have the problem of the preliminary case study which should be made by the agency requesting the commitment of the case, but which in reality is usually made by the institution at the earliest possible moment after the arrival of the case, since an intelligent understanding of the girl's background, her traits, and her behavior, has much to do with her training and rehabilitation.

Upon admission should be given a thorough physical examination to discover defects or weaknesses which may have contributed to her delinquency, and which need correction at the earliest possible moment, or need special consideration with regard to her work because they are irremedial. Good medical work, with frequent examination, is essential to the rehabilitation of all state wards.

The psychological examination should follow at such time when the girl is in a frame of mind to tell her troubles to some one. This is usually about the third day after she comes. She has about gotten

over the shock of coming and has begun to become acquainted with her new home. She wants to ask questions and in turn is willing to answer some herself. It is the psychological time to get her story and to make such tests of mentality, capacity and training as will guide the staff to a fair understanding of her case and make it a working basis for her future educational program. These examinations should be repeated at intervals to determine progress, and training should be changed according to results found.

Classification of wards should be made on the basis of the psychological and medical findings in the case. In a small institution complete classification is impossible, but it should be accomplished as fast as facilities permit, as each group, whether for psychological or medical reasons, needs special training.

The educational system should be comprehensive and suited to the needs of the individuals in the group. It should be largely informational and practical in character, though some academic work must form part of any practical program. Powers of observation must be developed. Appreciation of beauty, whether of nature, art or character, should be taught; patriotism and Americanism should be inculcated into their daily lives. Character-building should play a large part in the curriculum, and opportunity for expression given in every possible direction in work and play alike. Religious training and tolerance should be taught and religious training made a part of daily routine.

These girls need training that will lead to self-respect and self-support, as occupation at any suitable employment is a deterrent to misconduct.

There are certain things which the inmates have a right to expect of the institution, aside from the things mentioned above. They are:

1. A clean room and a good bed.
2. Clean clothing of sufficient quantity.
3. Good, plain food—sufficient in quantity, well-cooked and well-served.
4. Adequate bathing facilities.
5. A sufficient amount of work to keep muscles and nerves from atrophy or strain.
6. A reasonable amount of recreation.
7. Training that will lead to better living and self-direction.
8. Contact with officers who will mete out justice.

Upon the fulfillment of these expectations on the part of the inmates hangs the morale of the institution.

Confidence in the staff, knowledge that they are getting a square deal and individual treatment are requisites of morale.

The disciplinary problem in a reformatory must not be overlooked. Persons with warped ideas of life and stunted education need discipline. Above everything else persons deprived of personal liberty demand justice and particularly in disciplinary matters. We all like individual attention, so do they. They resent mass punishment, as they call it, and rightly so.

It is easier to deprive the entire group of certain privileges than to take hours to find out the particular offender. But unless we do, we miss the point of discipline largely. Back of all conduct lies a motive. Discipline must take this into account. A wise procedure is for the first offense to explain and analyze; for the second, warn, and the third, discipline, but in this to bear in mind that discipline to be constructive must not be punishment per se. It must act as a deterrent to bad behavior; it must be therapeutic in character rather than punitive. But though the treatment should be individual, the fact must still be enforced on them that we are all our "brothers' keepers," and that we must make the body politic feel that only by mutual helpfulness will the maximum good be attained for all. Self-control and self-direction are essential.

After the training in the institution has been completed the extra-mural problems begin. The parole work should be under the superintendent, as she has had the girl under supervision and knows her traits, her training and her background. The problem of finding suitable homes and suitable places of employment for our wards is a serious one. People who take them must be protected, but the knowledge they get for their protection fills them with suspicion and places the girl at a disadvantage at the start. Because a girl comes from an institution they often expect more of her in the way of work than of other servants.

The contact with the church, the community and the recreational center is as hard to make. Old friends hear of the release of our wards and try to set up the old connections. All these form problems which time will not permit us to go into.

There are other administrative problems in a woman's institution, but the account of these will indicate that they are many and intricate,



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that they need earnest study and scientific research to get at the causative factors and methods of treatment. It leads to one conclusion, that it needs the combined efforts of the four classes, namely, the public, the board of directors, the staff and the inmates, to bring about the solution.